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THE WIG,

AND THE

SHOULDER OF MUTTON.

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FRONTISPIECE.

AUGUSTUS FRIGHTENING HIS BROTHER.

page 26.

THE WIG

AND THE

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OR, THE

FOLLY OF JUVENILE FEARS.

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THE WIG

AND

THE SHOULDER OF MUTTON.

Mr. Friendly was one afternoon at home, and in the drawing-room with his four children, Lambert, Charlotte, Dorothy, and Felix, when three gentlemen, whose names were Vernon, Fairfield, and Fitzwilliam, came to see

him. The children loved them greatly, and were rejoiced to see them. They would always listen to their conversation with a greedy ear, because it was both amusing and instructive; and on this occasion sat till the night came on, without perceiving that they wanted candles. Mr. Vernon was relating a very curious circumstance that happened to him in his travels, when a singular noise was heard from the second flight of stairs. The children crowded together in a fright, behind their father, instead of going to see what was the matter, as they ought to have done. Mr. Vernon bid his eldest son, Lambert, step out; but Lambert passed the order to his sister Charlotte; Charlotte to Dorothy; and Dorothy passed it on to Felix.

All this was transacted in a moment. Mr. Friendly eyed them with a look, which seemed to ask if he or his friends should take the trouble to rise, and see what accident had happened.

Upon this, the four began their march towards the door, in the figure of a square, each supported by the other. They were now come near the door, when Lambert, with a fearful

step, advanced and opened it; but instantly fell back into his former place. The little ones were terrified on seeing an apparition clothed in white, crawling along. In short, our heroes uttered a shriek, and retreated towards their father, who rose from his seat, went to the door to ascertain the cause, and asked who was there.

"I, sir!" replied a voice, that ap-

peared to issue from some part of the flooring.

"I!" said Mr. Friendly, "and pray who are you?"

"The barber's boy, sir, looking for your wig."

Think, little friends, what bursts of laughter now succeeded their preceding silence. Mr. Friendly rang the bell for a light, and when it came,

perceived the wig-box broken, and the unfortunate wig entangled about the boy's right foot.

The father now asked his children what they had been afraid of. They could not tell, and really felt ashamed; for they had been accustomed from their infancy not to be afraid of being in the dark; and the servants were expressly forbidden to tell them any foolish stories about ghosts or goblins.

The preceding conversation being thus deranged, it came at last to turn upon this subject: what could occasion those surprising fears, so common to all children, particularly on going to bed in the dark?

"It is the natural effects of darkness, and that only," answered Mr.

Vernon; "as children cannot properly distinguish objects around them in the dark, their imagination, which is always smitten with the marvellous, shapes them out extraordinary figures, by enlarging or contracting what they look at, just as circumstances govern. Upon this, the notion of their weakness easily persuades them they are utterly unable to resist those mon-

sters, which they think armed to hurt them. Terror thus obtains possession of them, and too frequently impresses fears which have the worst consequences."

"They would be ashamed," said Mr. Friendly, "if they saw in open day what often gives them so much fright by night."

"It was for all the world," said Lambert, "just as if I saw it; but I needed only touch it, and then I knew very well what it was."

"Oh, yes," said Charlotte, "you have given us a very admirable proof of your courage. Needed only touch it! And therefore, I suppose, you would have had me touch the door, but that I pushed you forward."

"It becomes you well to talk about

my fear," said Lambert; "you that got behind poor Felix."

"And poor little Dorothy behind me," added the sly Felix.

"Come," said Mr. Friendly, "I can see you have nothing to reproach each other with. But Lambert's notion is not, upon that account, less rational; for, as in all the monstrous shapes that we image out continually

to ourselves, we have but natural accidents to fear, we may ward off all danger by the sense of feeling, which distinguishes what frequently deceives the sight. It is the neglect of this precaution in our infancy, that makes so many of us fancy ghosts in every object round about us. I remember on this head, a story, comical enough, which I will tell you."

The four children now came round their father, crying out, "A story! oh, a story!" and their father thus began it:—

"In my father's house, there lived a maid-servant, who one night was sent for beer into the cellar. We were all seated at the table, but could not set eyes upon the servant or beer. My mother, who was rather of a hasty

temper, rose from table, and went out to call her. As it chanced, the cellar door was open, but she could not make the servant hear. My mother ordered me to bring a candle, and go down into the cellar with her. I went first to light the way: but as I looked straight forward, and did not mind my steps, all at once I fell over something rather soft. My light went out

and getting up, I put my hand upon another hand, quite motionless and cold, which caused me to give an involuntary shriek. Upon the cry that I uttered, down came the cook-maid with a candle. They drew near, and we discovered the poor girl stretched all along upon the ground, face downward, in a swoon. We raised her up, and let her have a smelling-bottle. She recovered her spirits, but had hardly lifted up her eyes, when she cried out: 'There! there! she is there still:' 'Who is there?' replied my mother. 'That tall woman in white,' answered she, 'there, standing in the corner. See! see! see!' We looked the way that she pointed; and really did see, as she described it, somewhat white and of a tolerable

length, suspended in a corner. 'Is it only that?' replied the cook-maid, bursting out a laughing, 'why that is nothing but a SHOULDER OF MUTTON, which I bought last night. I hung it there, that it might be quite fresh and cool, and put a napkin round it, to keep off the flies.' She immediately took off the napkin, and exhibited the shoulder of mutton to her fellow ser-

vant, who stood trembling with terror.

"It was about a quarter of an hour before she was convinced of her ridiculous mistake. She would at first insist upon it, that the phantom stared her in the face with saucer eyes; that she had turned to run away, but that the ghost had followed her, fastened on her petticoat, and seized upon the

candle in her hand. What happened after this, she could not tell."

"It is very easy to explain all this," said Mr. Vernon: "and assign the reason why your servant fancied thus extravagantly. When the fright first seized her and she swooned, the circulation of the blood was stopped, and she could not run away; so she thought that she had been held. Her

limbs were deprived of their strength, so that she could not hold the candle, and therefore supposed that the spectre took it from her."

"We are happy," added he, "that the understanding and good sense of people have begun to dissipate these foolish notions concerning ghosts and goblins. There was once a time of so much ignorance, that these ideas, mixed with superstitious notions, had deprived the boldest of their courage; but, thank heaven, they are now almost done away in towns; though they exist now, in the country, where it is not at all uncommon to hear of witches, and evil spirits.

Mr. Fitzwilliam remarked, that many boys took delight in frightening their playmates, not thinking of the ill ef-

fects that generally attend such pastime. I have myself been very lately told of an unhappy incident, which shows how terribly the effects of fear may act on children. I will tell you the tale, my little friends, and I hope the story will not fail to cure you of a wish to frighten one another when it is dark, if ever you give way to such a practice.

"Charles Pomroy, a lad of great vivacity and understanding, had such a natural turn for music, that besides his daily lesson on the organ, which his master came to give him every morning, he would go at night upon a visit to his master, who resided in the neighbourhood, and there repeat it.

"Charles's brother Augustus was a good boy likewise, but had something of a turn towards drollery: he spent the time, when Charles was busy at his book, in scheming how he might play off some trick or other, no ways minding who became the object of his waggery. He took notice that his brother frequently came home alone, and sometimes when it was dark; so he turned his thoughts upon a con-

trivance to frighten him a little. He could walk in stilts. One evening, therefore, at the same time that his brother was expected home, he put himself into a pair of very high ones, wrapped a great white sheet about him, which trailed far behind upon the ground; and took a broad-brimed hat, which first of all he flapped, and having covered it with crape of a

sufficient length to hang a great way down on every side, but most of all before him, put it on his head. Thus frightfully equipped, he placed himself upright, and at a little distance from the house, close by the garden-gate, through which his brother always used to pass, coming home.

"Charles now returned home, delighted with the tune he had just learned, which he was whistling. He was scarce come within a short distance of the gate, when he perceived the vast spectre, which held out his arms, and advanced to attack him. Overcome with terror at the sight of such an apparition, he fell down, deprived of understanding. Poor Augustus, who had not foreseen the consequences of his fatal frolic, imme-

diately threw away his mask, and fell upon his brother's almost breathless body; he tried every means in his power to re-animate him: but, alas! the poor little fellow was almost dead.

"In the greatest agony Augustus called loudly for help, and his parents instantly came running to the spot. They carried Charles into the house and put him to bed, but it was some

time before they could restore animation. At length he opened his eyes, and viewed them with a vacant stupid look. They called him by every tender name; but he appeared as if he did not comprehend them. He endeavoured but in vain, to speak: his tongue essayed to do so, but without articulation. He is now deaf, dumb, and foolish, and will very probably remain so all his life-time.

"Six or seven months have now passed away since this melancholy accident took place, and the doctors who attend him have no hopes of his recovery.

"Imagine, my little friends, if you are able, the distress and sorrow of his parents. It would certainly have been better for them and him too, if

he had died on the spot. They would not then have had every day before them such a piteous object of affliction and despair.

"But their distress is nothing in comparison to Augustus's. Since the unfortunate accident, he has fretted himself to a mere skeleton. He can neither eat nor sleep. His tears exhaust him. Twenty times a-day he

walks about the room, and suddenly stops short: he wrings his hands, pulls up his hair, and curses even his birth. He calls and embraces his dear brother, who no longer knows him. I have seen them both, and cannot tell which of the two is most unhappy."

FINIS.

Dean and Munday, Printers, Threadneedle-street.

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